

## Stranger Universe by Destril

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**Summary:**

Mages and witches were killed off decades ago by the crown and there hasn't been one recorded since. Steve Harrington is a trader and hidden mage who visits the small town of Hawkins to sell his wares. On what seems like a routine stop Hawkins is attacked by monsters and Steve grabs the kids and flees in an attempt to survive, but these attacks are happening everywhere. With no where to go the boys set off on a journey to survive, find new allies and possibly stop the end of the world.

## Stranger Universe

### Author's Note:

I haven't seen a lot of Fantasy AU's for this fandom so I figured I'd kick things off. Enjoy!

There was something hitting his wagon.

The thought filtered into his consciousness slowly as he rolled over into a more comfortable position pulling his blanket tighter around himself and starting to drift off again.

Wait, there was something hitting his wagon.

Steve Harrington, trader extraordinaire jerked into a sitting position and threw himself at the doors to his wagon, running a quick hand through his hair.

With a hard push he swung the wagon door open and plastered on a grin on his face.

“Good morning, how can I-”

“Hey Steve!”

The grin he had forced fell into a more natural irritated scowl as it finally registered who exactly had been knocking on the wagon doors.

“What do you want Henderson, you know I don’t open till at least noon on my first day back in town.”

Dustin just grinned at him and honestly it was impossible to stay mad at the kid, he was just too happy all the time.

“Oh come on Steve you act like an old man, the sun has been up for hours and you said you were going to bring back more of those cool figures from the toymaker in Willowsbrook, you can’t expect a guy to wait till noon can you?”

“Looks like your little friends did.” Steve grumbled but pulled back into his cart and gestured for the kid to come in, trying to hide his grin as the kid scrambled into the dark interior with a whoop of excitement.

“Sit down and wait a minute, I need to open the place up a tad.”

Instead of doing as he was asked Dustin moved to the other side of the cart and easily began to open the flaps on the carts sides, allowing the early morning light to illuminate the interior. Steve rolled his eyes, he really was a sap, the kid did this every time he was in Hawkins and he had never once been able to refuse him.

As Dustin opened all the smaller flaps Steve went around and quietly whispered a quick enchantment causing the runes embedded in the wood to flare with a soft light before the wagon started to expand. As he moved back to the exit of the wagon the sides began to bulge outward almost doubling the width of the wagon. The wood paneling groaned as the side panel on the right side began to pull back making a large window like opening with a counter and a cloth piece detached from the roof to form a gently sloping canopy that easily shaded the newly formed selling window.

Steve stood off to the side watching with satisfaction as his wagon shifted the last bit and where had once been a normal travel wagon now stood a beautiful traders cart, he would never stop being proud of his little adjustments.

Dustin who at some point had come to stand next to the older boy was grinning like a loon, he was always completely taken with Steve’s little wagon and its different forms.

“So,” Steve said conversationally, “what gave me away this time? I made sure that I used a really well used road through town, so it wasn’t the wagon tracks or hoof prints, and I know that I got the illusion perfect this time.”

Dustin’s grin couldn’t possibly get any wider or he swore the kids face was gonna split.

“Now Steve how could you expect me to not know you were in town,

it's me!"

Steve gave the younger boy a unimpressed stare and raised an eyebrow. Dustin stared back for a moment longer before giving a put-out sigh and reluctantly admitting.

"I felt the shift when you did the illusion, no one around here has enough energy to do a shift that strong so I knew it had to be you, and that gave me the general area as well, from there it was just a matter of wandering around until I found an area big enough for your wagon to fit and just pushing through the illusion."

Steve sighed and shook his head.

"Damn, I thought for sure I had figured out how to mask my signature better, but it seems that I just can't fool you huh kid?"

He said it in a joking manner and ruffled the kids hair, but honestly the fact that his signature was not only noticeable, but strong enough to get a location from was actually really concerning. He knew that Dustin was a little bit of a special case when it came to this sort of thing, but still he would start working on some new masking techniques in his spare time.

He never felt like he was in any real danger in Hawkins, after all the town was small and far enough away from the capital that the folks were a little more lenient with rules out here, but that didn't mean word didn't travel and all it took was one slip up on his part and one person's off handed comment to the wrong person and he could find himself in real danger.

It had been years since there had been and real mages, or witches as the more common folk labeled them. Story was that they had been hunted to extinction nearly a century ago in fear of them having too much power that people didn't understand. As it was there hadn't been an occurrence of a fully trained mage since, though there were the occasional natural born witches still, such a Steve himself, though his powers were completely tied to his own body and soul and since he had no real training and he could only do basic things that he invented, nothing like the amazing acts that trained mages were said to perform such as summonings, and pulling energy from other

planes of reality.

Even though witches were extremely rare now people still feared them, and the crown had never removed the bounty for a witch's head. Steve had never met another, whether that just be because they hid themselves just as carefully as he did, or he was just the only one around he had no idea, but he had come across weird anomalies before, like Dustin.

Something he had learned early on in his travels was that one of his little innate abilities that didn't take a whole lot of thought on his part was reading auras, but only really strong ones showed up for him and only if he concentrated on a person hard enough with the intention of viewing their aura.

He remembered the first time he had come to Hawkins, Dustin and his friends had all come over to look at his wares and he had been keeping an eye on them, just in case any of them had sticky fingers when he had felt something off.

-1 year ago-

Steve watched in amusement as the kids practically drooled over the small wood and metal figures he had put up on display. It has taken days to make all those things and if he was being honest with himself, it was some of his best work. Figures he would be best at making toys and not real money makers like leather or iron work. It was all well and good that the kids liked his things, but it was their parents that held the coin purse.

He smiled as he watched boys crowd around the small display, all of them talking rapid speed about some game that these would be perfect for, when suddenly Steve felt a sharp poke and flinched. It took him a moment to realize that the poke hadn't been physical. Confused and a little alarmed the older boy immediately threw up a small shield around himself, a simple way to mask his magic. It wouldn't hold up if the person actively searched for his signature, but it would keep it from standing out.

As he was doing this another boy came barreling towards his wagon, shouting at his friends for leaving without him. Immediately Steve could tell there was something off about this kid.

He wasn't even focusing his attention on the kid and already his aura was shining like a beacon, pulsing strangely with a bluish white light. What the hell? He had seen people with naturally strong auras before, but this kid was on a whole new level.

The boy reached the cart and immediately joined his friends in their inspection of the figures and it took all Steve's self-control to not squint in the bright light.

The new kid suddenly paused and looked right at him and Steve had the uncomfortable feeling that the other was looking right through him. That he knew what Steve was.

Just as suddenly as the eye contact was made the kid broke it off as one of his friends said his name and pulled his attention to a particular monster like figure that they are debating over. Steve let out a shuddering breath and leaned on the back counter as his knees felt weak.

There was no way the kid could know. Sure, he had a weird aura, but Steve had been masking his magic for years, some little kid wasn't going to break through it that easily...right?

He broke from his increasingly paranoid thoughts as the group of boys presented him with their purchases and payments. He easily put on his sales face and completed the transaction smiling as the boys all thanked him and began to leave, but his heart sank when the one with the weird aura hung back.

"I'll catch up in a second guys my mom asked me to get some extra stuff."

The others all called back their farewells and ran off to go do who knows what, Steve couldn't find himself able to care much as he was now being stared down again by the kid. His heart rate was picking up and he felt a cool bead of sweat trickle down his temple. What was wrong with him, it was just some kid, one with a crazy powerful

aura that wouldn't stop staring at him.

"Hey."

Steve didn't mean to, but he flinched a little when the kid spoke, he could swear the aura was getting brighter. He hoped the kid didn't notice his little slip, and Steve quickly put on his best sales smile.

"What can I do for you kid? I think you mentioned grabbing some stuff for your mother? Just let me know what you're looking for and I'll let you know if i have them, and if not I can get them from another trader and bring them back on my next round, I'm actually pretty good about getting a hold of other wares if I have a request.

Steve knew he was rambling, but he couldn't help himself, something was off about this kid and he could feel his magic buzzing under his skin in response to his anxiety making it even harder to stay calm.

"Hey."

The kid spoke again, and Steve realized he had zoned out for a moment. With tremendous effort he forced himself to focus on the kid again. The kid, Steve thought his friends might have called him Dustin, was looking a little cautious now and when he spoke again his voice was calm and soft almost like the kid was talking to a particularly skittish horse. He should probably be annoyed by that, but right now Dustin had his full attention.

"Why are you so scared huh? Like I am literally the least threatening kid in this town, but your emotions are all over the place. What's the deal? Did I say something weird?"

It took the older boy a few second to really comprehend what the kid had said, but once he did his entire line of thought stopped. His emotions? Wait, what?

"Oh come on of course I can sense your emotions, you might as well be yelling them at me right now, I mean what kind of empath are you that you can't even shield your emotions?"

The kid suddenly squinted his eyes looking suspicious.

“Wait, you are an empath, aren’t you? Like you’re projecting on like a massive scale so you have to be right?”

Steve’s mind was reeling, what was this kid talking about? He wasn’t and empath? And what did he mean he was projecting, he had his shields up, there should be no way for the kid to sense his magic, especially on the level the kid was insinuating right now.

The older boy tried desperately to formulate a decent response, but instead all he managed to get out was,

“What? I’m not an empath.”

The kids face scrunched for a second before there was a sudden dawning look of horror.

“Oh uh what are you talking about man? What’s an empath? Where did you ever hear about something like that, hey I just remembered I was supposed to pick up an order at the carver’s, I’d better go do that so have a nice day!”

The words were spoken in such a rush Steve only caught a handful of them, but he heard the most important part.

“Oh no way, you are not going to just say something like that to me and then just leave. What the heck are you talking about?”

The boy looked even more panicked now, which usually would have made Steve back off, but this was too important. If this kid had sensed his magic then there was a chance someone else had to, or that this kid would tell someone and then where would he be?

The kid made a desperate attempt to make a run for it, but Steve lunged across the small counter and managed to snag the back of the kid’s shirt and yank him back against the counter.

“Stop it! I’m not going to hurt you, but I need to know what you were talking about just now so lets make a deal, you stop trying to get away and talk to me, then once we have worked this all out I let you go and we can both go about our days. Okay?”

The younger boy continued to struggle for a few more moments



before realizing that Steve had a surprisingly strong grip and finally nodded begrudgingly.

“Fine.”

“Good now if you would kindly step inside my cart we can talk privately.”

The kid looked even more nervous after those words and Steve mentally slapped himself at how bad that probably sounded.

“Or we could just sit around the back of the cart if that would make you feel more comfortable? Look I really just want to talk, nothing sinister.”

The boy still looked wary but relaxed against his hold and nodded again.

“Okay, we can talk behind the cart, but I’m warning you now I can scream really loud, like louder than anyone I know, so you try anything and it’s over for you. The whole town will know somethings up, and my friends know what you look like so they could hunt you down.”

Steve sighed and released his grip on the other boy’s shirt and beckoned him to go around as he himself backed up into the cart, pulling the shutter on the selling window. He glanced around the disproportionally large interior of his little cart and steeled himself mentally before stepping out the back and walking around to the other side.

He was relieved to find the kid had sat himself on one of the extra crates Steve had placed back here to keep up the small cart, less storage illusion.

“Okay so what-”

“What’s your name?”

Steve blinked as he was rudely cut off by the kid’s question.

“Uh Steve, what’s yours?”

“Dustin.”

“Oh, uh okay. Well Dustin I really need to know what you meant when you said I was projecting my emotions. Also, how that would mean I was an empath.”

Dustin fidgeted a little before taking a deep breath and suddenly staring right at Steve with surprisingly serious eyes, they looked out of place on the kid for some reason.

“Look, I’m not supposed to talk about this to other people, especially complete strangers, the only reason I haven’t bolted yet is because there is no way you are normal. However, you have to swear not to tell anyone about this, like I’m serious this is a really serious thing. I won’t say anything about you if you don’t say anything about me, deal?”

Dustin held his hand out and Steve found himself hesitantly shaking it.

“Okay, so i’m pretty sure you figured out by now that I’m have some abilities on some level?”

Steve nodded slowly.

“Alright so as far as I can tell I’m telepathic or something? At least that’s the only way I can explain things. I can feel other people’s emotions and can kind of skim peoples thoughts? I mean I say skim, but I usually don’t try to do it, sometimes it just happens when someone’s brain is really active, like if you’re scared or excited stuff like that, and emotions that strong kind of get stuck to thoughts when that happens. I can ignore basic thoughts that people have, but bursts like that are tricky, sometimes I block them, but other times, like earlier, they are strong enough to break through.”

Dustin pauses a moment and looks at Steve for a second before continuing.

“Your panic was so strong though that there was no thought attached, it was literally just a huge burst of emotion, which made me think you were an empath. But you’re not. Which means that you

were really scared, like honest to god terrified and somehow I triggered that, so what gives? Like I said I'm not scary, but I have only seen that kind of fear when someone thinks they are going to die or something like that, so what happened?"

Steve was numb, there were other people with abilities. This kid was an honest to god telepath. All this time he never even knew that there were different kinds of magic, but this kid was living, breathing proof that maybe he wasn't completely alone.

"Hey! Look the deal was we both fessed up, I did my part so you have to tell me what you are too!"

Jerking back at the sudden loudness of the kids voice the older boy could only blink for a moment before he felt the telltale sting of tears in his eyes. He wasn't alone.

"Holy shit, hey man I'm sorry? I didn't mean to yell, you don't have to cry or anything, like if it's a bad topic we don't have to go in depth, I was just curious-"

"No no it's not that, it's just, I've always thought I was one of the last magic users out here, but you are too! I'm not the only one!"

"Oh, um okay-wait magic?"

Steve tried to stop crying, but he couldn't seem to get it to stop so he just nodded smiling.

"Ya, I have never met anyone else with magic and I never knew that there could be different types, but when I saw your aura I knew something was up and I was right! You have magic like me!"

His chest felt so light, like a weight had been lifting and he knew he was smiling like a loon, but he just couldn't help himself. He looked at the kid again and suddenly that happy feeling faded a little. Dustin didn't look happy?

He looked confused?

"What's wrong?"

“Look man I hate to tell you, but I don’t know what you’re talking about, like mine is just some enhanced mental abilities, nothing magic. But you said you had magic? What does that even mean? And what are you talking about my aura?”

His mind was reeling, the kid didn’t have magic. He was still alone.

He had just outed himself.

His entire body was suddenly made of ice and he felt himself starting to shake with the sudden change in temperature.

He couldn’t breathe, why was it so cold, oh my god he couldn’t breathe!

“Oh shit, shit shit shit! Hey! Hey man come on it’s okay, oh man it’s okay buddy I swear I won’t tell anyone, please just breathe, come on in and out you can do it.”

Dustin was looking around frantically now, he had seen Will go through this before, but usually Mike was the one to calm him down! He didn’t know what to do to help this guy, he literally just met him!

“Uh, uh hey for real I swear on my mom that I won’t tell anyone and hey even if I don’t have magic we can still be friends! If you agree to that then you won’t be alone right? Maybe once we get to know each other more you can even join the party. Mike will initiate you and everything. Won’t that be great? Then you won’t just have me, you will have the whole party as your friends and you will never be alone because that’s how the party works, everyone looks out for everyone!”

Dustin knew he was rambling, but Steve seemed to have started to listen at some point and was starting to breath slower so he must be doing something right.

“I’ll have to introduce you to the others of course and we would have to figure out your role in the party, everyone has one so we would need to conduct an interview of sorts to figure out what would suit you best, but I’m sure there is something you’re good at so it won’t take that long, and even if you are horrible at everything we could

come up with a new role or something.”

“What the heck are you talking about?”

Dustin had taken his eyes off the older boy at some point while he was talking so he hadn’t noticed Steve had regained his composure, though he still looked a little shaky.

“Oh good you’re okay now, you are okay now right?”

Steve stared at Dustin like there might be something wrong with him before answering slowly.

“Ya, ya I’m okay now. In fact, lets just never mention any of this again okay?”

Dustin nodded and stuck out his hand, which Steve shook.

“Okay but honestly your secret is safe with me because I might not have magic, but I get what you’re going through, in a way? I mean you can probably guess that what I do isn’t exactly normal either and my mom said that even though it wasn’t magic that there were still people who might want to hurt me because I’m different so we are kind a in the same boat. And I have never met anyone else with abilities either, so ya, you want to be secret power friends?”

Steve was silent for a moment before an incredulous bark of laughter forced its way out of him and then he couldn’t stop laughing at how ridiculous this all was. Dustin laughed nervously along and waited for the other boy to calm down.

When he finally did Steve wiped his eyes and grinned at the younger boy.

“You know what? Sure, let’s be secret power friends.”

Dustin whooped and gave the other an enthusiastic hug and then started on a whole new tirade about how cool they were and all the stuff they were going to do together.

-Present-

Since then every time Steve visited Hawkins he and Dustin would

spend hours together sharing gossip, talking about anything new they learned about their abilities and Steve was slowly teaching Dustin different bits of magic.

The kid couldn't actually do any of the things Steve showed him, but he absorbed the knowledge anyways with a huge grin and a ton of his normal enthusiasm.

Dustin had eventually introduced him to the "party" which was a group of Dustin's friends. Though they all had spoken to Steve on several occasions no move had ever been made to induct him into their group which Steve was fine with, though Dustin seemed a little disappointed.

Dustin had held his word too. Eventually he admitted that his friends knew he had a little bit of abilities, and were okay with it and kept it secret, but he had never mentioned anything about Steve's and he was really touched that this kid who obviously shared everything with his friends had respected his wish to remain secret.

He didn't feel like they would out him, but years of paranoia were hard to break from so he and Dustin continued with their secret routine and everything was fine.

He was startled out of his fond musing as Dustin called his name.

"Hey Steve, so I might have mentioned to the others that you would be here today and opening early so you should probably take down the illusion before they actually start looking for your cart."

"Seriously Henderson? Fine whatever, I don't even care anymore. Actually, you know what? Go find your friends and go get me something fresh from the bakery while I finish up and maybe I won't hide those figurines you were so excited for."

Steve smirked at the scandalized look he received for his threat before Dustin threw up his hands in defeat.

"Fine I'll get you your stupid bread, but I better get a discount when I get back!"

"Maybe."

Dustin huffed and gave Steve one last suspicious look before hopping down from the cart and running off.

The elder boy watched until the kid rounded a corner before turning back to his cart and releasing the illusion keeping it hidden. He walked around it a few times to make sure everything was in order and was just mounting the step to climb back inside when a horrific screeching sound filling the air.

Startled he whipped around as another scream rang out.

It sounded like it was coming from the town center.

He immediately took off in that direction, weaving between buildings until finally he could see it.

The center of town.

The center of town where the ground had suddenly grown black and there was now a crater the size of a house.

As he and some of the townsfolk stared something moved at the edge of the crater and suddenly things were swarming over the edge, their screams mixed with those of the people who had been staring at the hole.

They looked like small hounds, but they were wrong, their skin was an oily grey and their faces, holy shit their entire face was a mouth!

Steve stumbled back as something new hit him. His magic flared and twisted as the sensation washed over him.

It was magic.

It was magic, but it was dark and twisted and slimy and raw. It was overwhelming his senses and he felt like he was drowning in it.

As he struggled to regain control of himself another sound, this one deeper, shook the very ground beneath him and he could only watch in horrified awe as something huge rose out of the hole.

It was bigger than anything he had ever seen, long tentacles swirling

around its massive form as it seemed to float weightlessly into the sky.

The weather was changing as it rose, dark clouds gather around it, spiraling around its mass as lightning skittered between them until the thing was completely surrounded by the raging storm.

It was like the world froze beneath it for a moment, and then the first bolt of lightning streaked down from the swirling storm and with a crack struck a nearby roof lighting it ablaze.

The world suddenly launched back into action, screams rang out as the dog like creatures sprang forward, charging at the gathered crowd and more poured from the hole.

The cry of the giant beast rang out of the scene of horror and Steve was struck by a thought.

They were under attack and they were going to die.